



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## 114TH FIGHTER WING TO HONOR COVID-19 RESPONDERS WITH F-16 FLYOVER

South Dakota Air National Guard's 114th Fighter Wing will conduct a series of flyovers at several healthcare facilities throughout Eastern South Dakota Saturday, May 16, to honor fellow Americans working to fight the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). The flyovers will serve to salute and show appreciation for healthcare workers, first responders and other essential personnel working on the frontlines to combat COVID-19 while demonstrating the Air National Guard's continued readiness.

Four F-16 fighting falcons from the 114th Fighter Wing will pass over hospitals in nine cities.

The estimated times and locations for the flyovers are:

|                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| Aberdeen: 1335-1345  | Sioux Falls: 1450-1500 |
| Brookings: 1310-1320 | Vermillion: 1435-1445  |
| Huron: 1410-1420     | Watertown: 1320-1330   |
| Mitchell: 1420-1430  | Yankton: 1430-1440     |
| Pierre: 1355-1405    |                        |

Community residents and staff are encourage to step outside to view the flyover, but are reminded to practice physical distancing and not gather in large groups.

The flyovers are conducted as part of the Department's Operation American Resolve and the Air Force Salutes morale flyover plan, and are performed within regularly scheduled training missions. The 114th Fighter Wing continues to maintain mission assurance throughout COVID-19 by supporting Overseas Contingency Operations, defending U.S. airspace, and providing support to civil authorities.

Everyone is encouraged to share their patriotic photos and videos of the flyover event with the 114th Fighter Wing Facebook.

For more information, follow the 114th Fighter Wing Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/114thFighterWing/> or contact the 114th Fighter Wing Public Affairs office at (605) 988-5946.

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# VA NATIONAL CEMETERIES TO COMMEMORATE MEMORIAL DAY

The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs' (VA) National Cemetery Administration (NCA) announced it will commemorate Memorial Day this year with solemn wreath laying ceremonies.

Another offering is a new online memorial feature allowing the public to pay tribute to veterans interred in VA national cemeteries across the country.

"This year, by necessity, will be different from past Memorial Day observances," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "While the department can't hold large public ceremonies, the VA will still honor veterans and service members with the solemn dignity and respect they have earned through their service and sacrifice."

Each VA national cemetery will conduct a brief wreath laying ceremony, accompanied by a moment of silence and the playing of Taps. In keeping with [CDC guidelines](#) to limit large gatherings, the ceremonies will not be open to the public.

Secretary Wilkie will preside over the wreath laying at Quantico National Cemetery in Virginia on Memorial Day. Acting Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs Pamela Powers will do the same at Culpeper National Cemetery in Virginia, while Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Randy Reeves will lay a wreath at Riverside National Cemetery in California Friday, May 22, and at Calverton National Cemetery in New York on Memorial Day. Live streaming, recorded video and photographs from these and other ceremonies will be shared on NCA's [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) pages.

Other public events typically associated with Memorial Day at national cemeteries, including group placement of flags at gravesites, will not take place. However, all VA national cemeteries will be open Memorial Day weekend from dawn to dusk for public visitation.

Cemetery visitors are asked to adhere to health and safety guidelines and maintain physical distancing while visiting. Visitors are also urged to consider visiting Friday, Saturday or Sunday to avoid possible crowds on Memorial Day. Families may continue the tradition of placing flowers and small American flags at their Veteran's gravesite.

The VA will also be launching a new way for the public to pay tributes to Veterans at the [Veterans Legacy Memorial](#) (VLM). The site, originally launched in 2019, contains a memorial page for each veteran and service member interred in a VA national cemetery. Starting Thursday, May 14, VLM will permit online visitors to leave a comment of tribute on a veteran's page, introducing a new way to observe Memorial Day. The tribute allows visitors to voice memories and appreciation for a veteran's service. All comments will be reviewed for appropriateness prior to being posted.

As it has in years past, VA is again partnering with [Carry The Load](#) this Memorial Day to honor select "Veterans of the Day" with remembrances on social media from May 11-25.

# VA COVID-19 STAFFING AND SUPPLY UPDATE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has maintained an increasing supply of beds for both veterans and COVID-19 patients, steady supplies across the nation and a stable staffing situation in the vast majority of VA locations nearly two months into the national emergency.

As of late April, the VA had the capacity to take in 12,215 critical and non-critical patients, up from 9,840 in March.

That increase was the result of a decision to defer elective surgeries in anticipation of a rising number of patients infected with COVID-19. It created capacity that has allowed the VA to take in non-veteran patients across the country.

This early preparation has allowed the VA's overall occupancy rates to remain steady at 35-40% nationwide in both acute care and intensive care units (ICUs), well below the crisis capacity levels that some feared as the virus spread.

"The VA's team has managed its resources wisely during this crisis," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "By deferring elective surgeries, the department opened ample space for COVID-19 patients and has been able to serve its 'Fourth Mission' of caring for all Americans during this crisis."

The VA's stock of medical supplies remains robust with millions of N95 masks on hand, along with plenty supplies of hand sanitizer, gloves, gowns and eye protection. On April 30 the VA took possession of another 4.5 million masks the department purchased with the aid of New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu and inventor Dean Kamen who helped facilitate the medical supplies being flown to his home state in the face of this crisis.

The VA also had 1,943 ICU ventilators on hand as of April 24, along with 826 transport ventilators and 1,218 anesthesia machines.

The VA has been testing more and more people as America's overall testing capacity has increased. As of late April, the VA tested more than 109,000 people, resulting in more than 92,000 negative tests and about 9,200 positive tests. The remainder are pending results.

About 63% of the veterans who tested positive are now at least 14 days from that test result and most of them are recuperating at home.

While about 2,200 VA employees had tested positive for the coronavirus in late April, the VA is still able to provide care to veterans across the country, while helping 38 states and territories care for COVID-19 patients, either through missions assigned by the Federal Emergency Management Agency or by working directly with state officials.

Most VA medical facilities are reporting lower sick-leave usage than normal. Additionally, the VA has been bringing on new personnel at a record pace to bolster staff at its facilities.

Between March 29 and April 28, the VA hired 9,338 medical staff, including 2,147 registered nurses and thousands of additional staff are expected to join VA into early May.

# ALL 2020 MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT MISSIONS ARE POSTPONED

The Midwest Honor Flight's board of directors made the difficult decision to postpone all 2020 scheduled flights out of caution for our veterans, guardians, and crew. This heartbreaking decision was not made lightly as many hours of planning have taken place to make these flights possible. This change comes after the National Honor Flight Network announced their Lone Eagle trips, which are conducted by the Network staff for terminal veterans and those without home Hubs, are also postponed until 2021.

This decision has an immediate impact on the 2020 Missions on August 22 (Lyon County Riverboat Foundation Mission 7), September 5 (Clifford & LaVonne Graese Foundation Mission 8), September 19 (Mission 9), and October 10 (Mission 10). Guardian Training opportunities for these flights have also been postponed. No veterans or guardians had been confirmed for these flights but those that were up for consideration will be receiving this release along with an additional letter with more information.

"Our first priority on every Midwest Honor Flight Mission is the safety of our veterans, our guardians, and our crew," says Aaron Van Beek, the President of Midwest Honor Flight. "With all the unknowns, we decided to wait until traveling and gathering restrictions are lifted to ensure all our veterans have a safe and enjoyable trip in Washington, D.C. This decision was certainly not taken lightly as numerous hours have been given by our faithful volunteers in an effort to bring our local Veterans out to see their memorials. However, safety is, and will always be, our number one priority. We appreciate everyone's continued support and patience as we work through these challenging times and look forward to seeing everyone again at upcoming events and missions in the future."

Midwest Honor Flight will continue to monitor the situation and keep the communities informed of any future updates.

Applications are still being accepted during this time. To apply or to learn more about their Midwest Honor Flight visit: <https://www.midwesthonorflight.org/covid.html>.



# VA'S PLAN ON RETURNING TO PRE-COVID-19 OPERATIONS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced a three-phase plan for resuming regular operations at its medical centers, benefit offices and national cemeteries in a post-COVID-19 setting.

The VA never closed its doors during the pandemic but did implement a wide range of actions to ensure the safety of its patients and employees. Under the VA's plan, conditions on the ground will determine how quickly each facility resumes normal operations, and each phase of the plan is aimed at making sure that Veterans' safety comes first.

"A central planning solution for resuming regular operations makes no sense here because some areas of the country will take longer to recover, while other areas have seen minimal cases," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "That's why we're letting local conditions dictate our next steps."

VA medical facilities will be permitted to embark on Phase 1 of the plan once certain local conditions have been met. These conditions include falling numbers of patients exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, reduced numbers of people testing positive for the virus, and increased testing capacity.

Once these and other conditions are met, local VA facilities will maintain their current risk-mitigation activities (such as continued telework when possible) but may also begin assessing how best to permit elective procedures and resume certain face-to-face visits that have been postponed.

Phase 2 of the plan is the resumption of services that have been postponed, again as deemed possible based on local conditions, and subject to safety protocols deemed as necessary by local staff.

In Phase 3, VA facilities will again allow visitors to hospitals, community living centers, senior living facilities, and spinal cords injury and disorder units after a full assessment of the risks and only amid continuing improvement in their part of the country. Most VA employees will also return to work in this phase.

The VA's national cemeteries, benefit administrators and Board of Veterans Appeals will also be using this same three-phase approach to determine whether and how best to resume things like public cemetery interments and face-to-face meetings with veterans about their benefit status.



# MAY IS MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH MONTH

The VA provides female veterans with the tools, resources and information they need to feel their best mentally and physically. May is Maternal Mental Health Month and the VA wants female veterans to know that many women experience mental health issues during the perinatal period (or during and after pregnancy).

Perinatal mental health problems can cause confusion, disappointment, and stress at a time when women feel pressure to be happy and celebratory. Many women find the transition into parenthood challenging and may even find it difficult to feel happy and connected to children when experiencing mental health symptoms.

It is important for female veterans to know that mental health issues are treatable and not their fault. Many women experience mental health symptoms at some point in their lives. Experiencing issues with mental health does not mean a woman is weak or a bad parent. Many loving, effective parents have mental health issues and learn to cope with them.

There are many types of treatments that can ease mental health symptoms during and after pregnancy. These can include psychotherapy, light therapy, exercise and nutritional changes. In some cases, medication is also needed. VA providers can help women learn coping strategies. They can provide veterans with tools, resources and tailored treatment plans. The VA can also recommend treatments to *prevent* mental health problems during and after pregnancy.

The campaign materials direct women veterans to resources such as:

[Make The Connection](#)

[My HealtheVet depression screening tool](#)

[Women Veterans Call Center](#)

[Veterans Crisis Line](#)

[National Institutes of Health](#)

[Connect to Community Resources](#)

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

Learn more by visiting [SharePoint](#) to access additional information, materials, and resources for local outreach.



# VA AND PARKINSON'S FOUNDATION FORM PARTNERSHIP

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the [Parkinson's Foundation](#) announced they are teaming up to improve the health, well-being and quality of life of veterans living with Parkinson's disease.

"This collaboration ensures veterans diagnosed with Parkinson's have access to the information and resources they need to better manage their health," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The joint effort enhances the [multitude of services](#) that care teams at the Veterans Health Administration provide to veterans with Parkinson's disease."

"The VA and the foundation are working to increase access to information about Parkinson's disease," said John L. Lehr, president and chief executive officer of the Parkinson's Foundation. "Educating and training VA staff on disease management and therapies, along with improving veterans' access to direct health services related to the disease is a paramount objective".

These efforts help to provide veterans with needed resources and tools for coping with Parkinson's. The foundation also offers [online resources](#) for individuals and their caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic, to include Facebook Live Q&A events with subject matter experts.



Learn more about how the Parkinson's Foundation improves care and [advances research toward a cure](#).

# VA KICKS OFF ON-LINE CAMPAIGN EMPHASIZING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

In recognition of Mental Health Month, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the launch of the “Now Is the Time” campaign.

The focus is on getting veterans the support they need from family and friends through professional mental health treatment.

“As VA’s health care environment continues to evolve, the department is working to serve as many veterans as possible by reaching veterans where they are, said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This May, VA encourages everyone to explore Mental Health Month resources at [MakeTheConnection.net/MHM](https://MakeTheConnection.net/MHM). Veterans and their families can help themselves or someone they love learn about the support that can improve their lives.”

This year’s Mental Health Month presents an extra challenge as the world confronts the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak. With the added stress, the VA urges veterans to prioritize their mental health and stay engaged with VA information as it becomes available at the following webpages:

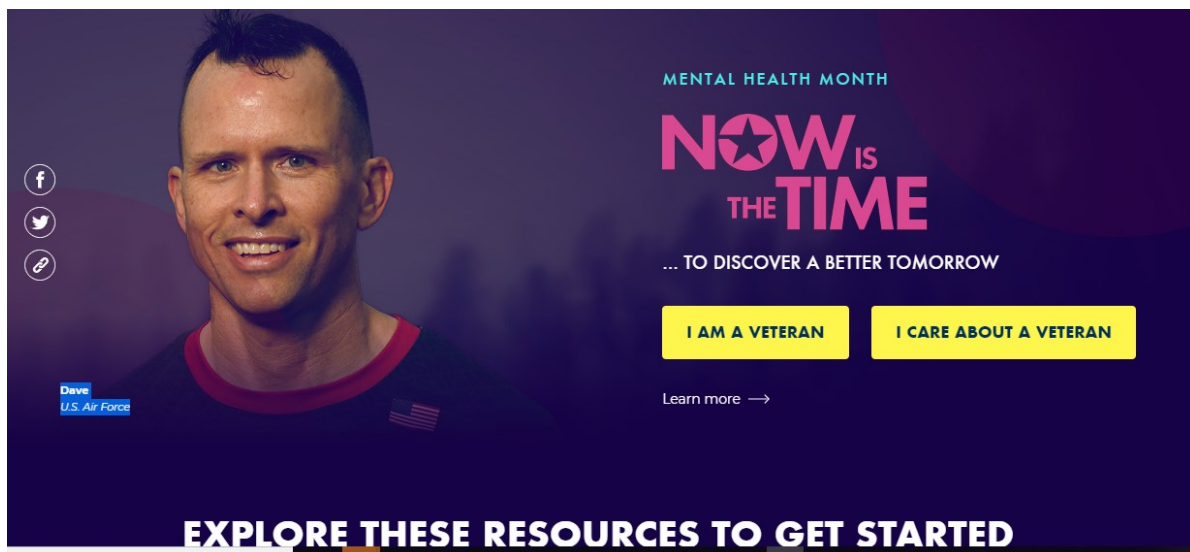
[VA Novel Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

[VA Coronavirus FAQs](#)

[CDC Coronavirus](#)

[USA.gov Coronavirus](#)

Learn more about mental health resources and [hear stories of recovery](#) from other veterans.





# VA INITIATIVES NAMED FINALISTS IN SAMMIES

Two U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) initiatives were recently named finalists of the [Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medals](#) (Sammies) for VA's Connected Care program and 3D printing initiatives.

Leadership and management of VA's Connected Care's efforts on telehealth, mobile apps and other digital health solutions has made headway in removing barriers to care for thousands of veterans, while the department's contribution to science through the 3D Printing Network has assisted health care providers with medical procedures and reduction of unnecessary surgeries.



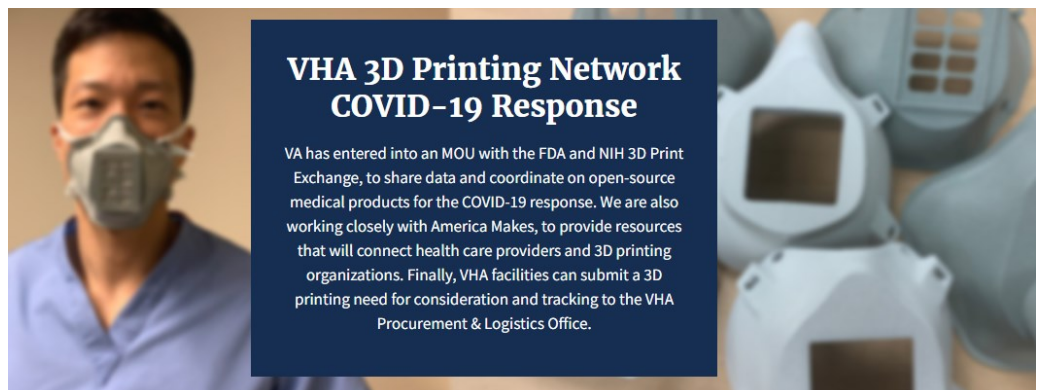
"The VA has long been a leader in incorporating innovative technologies to meet the health care needs of our nation's veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "It's inspiring to see these programs and the leaders recognized for their tireless work in improving health care services for veterans."

Among the accomplishments from the finalists, in fiscal year 2019, more than 900,000 veterans used VA telehealth services, resulting in almost three million appointments. VA Video Connect sessions increased by 235% with close to 100,000 veterans joining virtual appointments from home and nearly 300,000 total appointments.

My HealtheVet has surpassed five million registered users. In March alone, there were over two million prescription refill requests submitted through My HealtheVet — the most VA prescription refill requests ever made through the patient portal in a single month. VA Video Connect visits increased from approximately 2,000 per day to between 16,000 and 18,000 per day in mid-April.

In March, VA quickly mobilized its 3D printing resources nationwide to help with the fight against COVID-19. The department is also the first integrated health care system in the United States to establish a national 3D Printing Network that enables its health care staff to share ideas, resources and best practices to deliver quality care to patients throughout its enterprise. Innovations in 3D printing across the VA have led to advancements in surgery, prosthetics and the treatment of chronic illnesses. Additionally, 3D printing is enabling VA's medical providers to customize and tailor solutions to unique, individual patient needs, putting the veteran at the center of their treatment plan.

The Sammies highlight innovative work and accomplishments in federal government that meet the needs of Americans. VA Sammies finalists can be viewed [here](#).



# VA ACCEPTS MASK DONATION FROM SOUTH KOREA TO ASSIST WITH COVID-19 EFFORTS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has accepted a donation of half a million N95 protective masks from the Republic of Korea to assist the department in combating the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.

The donated masks will be distributed for use nationally across the VA.

The masks arrived at Joint Base Andrews Naval Air Facility in Prince George's County, Maryland on a South Korean military transport flight. Both VA and South Korean embassy officials were present to meet the flight.

“The Republic of Korea’s generous gift to America’s Veterans is deeply appreciated and we humbly accept,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “We will use it to carry out our solemn mission of caring for our veterans. It is also a sign of the deep and ongoing respect our two nations have for each other — cemented nearly 70 years ago in a time of war and great crisis. So many years later, we are joined in another just and noble cause of containing a pandemic that threatens our citizens’ lives and livelihoods and poses a grave threat to the Veterans we have both pledged to protect. This gesture has indeed touched the hearts of American Veterans and we are grateful to have such a close ally in these uncertain times.”

*Veterans Health Administration - Office  
of Emergency Management*

## COVID-19 Response Plan

*Incident-specific Annex to the VHA High  
Consequence Infection (HCI) Base Plan*

*Version 1.6 March 23, 2020*

Visit the [VA's public health response](#) for more information on ways to protect against COVID-19.

# VA RELEASES NEW COVID-19 COACH MOBILE APP

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the launch of the COVID Coach app, a new mobile app designed to help both veterans and civilians cope with feelings of stress and anxiety they may be experiencing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The app includes practical tools, information and resources that can all be used from the safety of one's home to track well-being, mood swings and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms.

A personal goal setting tracker can help users work toward achieving small victories. The mindfulness

and sleep tools can be helpful for improving mental health and well-being. The indoor activities tool and staying healthy recommendations have been specifically tailored to the current COVID-19 situation.

"The VA wants to make sure veterans have access to every resource available," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "The COVID Coach app provides tools and information to stay mentally and physically healthy."

Direct links to resources are available within the app for those who may need additional professional support. The COVID Coach can be used independently or while engaged in mental health treatment but is not intended to replace needed professional care.

COVID Coach was developed by VA's National

Center for PTSD's Mobile Mental Health Team, in conjunction with the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. [Download](#) the app on iOS and Android devices or from [VA's Mobile App Store](#). Con-

**VA Mobile Apps**

**Mobile Apps: COVID Coach**

The COVID Coach app was created for everyone, including Veterans and Servicemembers, to support self-care and overall mental health during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Features include:

- Education about coping during the pandemic
- Tools for self-care and to improve emotional well-being
- Trackers to check your mood and measure your growth toward personal goals
- Graphs to visualize progress over time

Download  
iTunes (iOS)   
Google Play (Android)   
Documents  
Flyer (PDF)

**VA Mobile** ABOUT VA APP STORE NEWS & DISCUSSIONS

**VETERANS COVID Coach**

★★★★★ Average: 3.9 (16 votes)

Download on the App Store GET IT ON Google Play

Description Feedback to VA

# UPCOMING EVENTS

May 16—Armed Forces Day  
May 20—SDDVA Skype Mini Conference—10:00 am (CT)  
May 25—Memorial Day  
May 25—State Offices closed  
Jun 14—Flag Day  
Jun 21—Fathers Day  
Jun 27—DAV State Convention—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls  
Jul 6—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)  
Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)  
Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre  
Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair  
Sep 3-7—SD State Fair  
Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)  
Oct 26-30—National Summit on Women Veterans Issues (more information coming)  
Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

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